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China After the War

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"Can the Christians of China save the Nation?"

This is the question that in the early days of August, 1918, was being faced by a little group of Chinese Christian leaders, met together in the Lily Valley just above Kuling, the missionary summer resort in the mountains of Kiangsi Province in Central China.

The Nation was at the time in a critical condition. Parliament had been dissolved, and its members, believing that they had been unjustly driven from office, had set up a rival Government at Canton. The Peking Government was in the hands of independent and irresponsible military Governors of the Northern and Central provinces. The troops of the two Governments had clashed in different parts of the country and had inflicted much unnecessary suffering on the civilian population. Rarely, if ever, had brigandage been more widespread, and life and property less secure. Famine was raging in Chihli, the result of the serious floods of the previous year. The corruption of the Government officials was notorious and some of those occupying the highest positions in the Central Government had agreed, for the

sake of a bribe of $5,000,000 "bargain money," to purchase from the foreign opium merchants in Shanghai the balance of their Indian opium for the sum of about $12,000,000 (U. S. currency). This was leading in several provinces to the revival of the cultivation of the poppy and threatened to undo the magnificent work of the previous years in ridding the country of the drug. Even more serious than this, in the judgment of these men, was the fact that for the sake of obtaining money to maintain itself in power, the Central Government was selling to foreigners valuable mining and railroad concessions under terms that endangered the very integrity of the Nation itself. China had taken her stand with the Allies, and 150,000 of her sons were serving both as skilled and unskilled laborers in connection with the Allied armies; but she was so absorbed in her own problems and confused by widespread propaganda about the real issues at stake that the great War seemed a thing far away, and many, even, of the leaders failed to understand its moral issues and its vital significance for China as well as for the rest of the world.

Day by day the little group of Christian men met to pray for the salvation of their country and to seek light as to what the Christians could do to help. The leader of the group was Mr. Hsü Chien, a former Vice-Minister of Justice. In order to attend this meeting he had refused an important position in the

Southern Government. Although a Christian of but a few years' standing, he had already risen to a position of leadership in the Church. In the struggle for religious liberty in 1917 he acted as Chairman of a Committee composed of Protestants, Roman Catholics, Mohammedans and Buddhists, which fought for and secured the inclusion in the National Constitution of a clause guaranteeing religious liberty to the Chinese people. Another member of the group was Dr. C. Y. Cheng, Chinese Secretary of the China Continuation Committee, which serves as the National Missionary Council of China. Dr. Cheng is one of the most enlightened and far-sighted of Chinese Christian leaders and is trusted and loved by Chinese and foreigners alike. Mr. David Z. T. Yui, General Secretary of the National Committee of the Young Men's Christian Association, was there also. Some years before he had taken his M. A. degree in Harvard in "education," and his illustrated lectures on this subject, prepared primarily to arouse the educated classes of China to the need of universal education, have stirred the hearts of thoughtful people in the leading cities throughout the land and have brought tears to the eyes of more than one Commissioner of Education as he was made to realize how far behind other nations China is in the matter of the education of the masses. Of the others present two were educators, several were returned students from Japan, one a brillant young student from Hong-

kong University, who was converted only a few months before during the evangelistic meetings conducted by Sherwood Eddy, and who had been disinherited on account of his acceptance of the Christian faith.

A group of men more thoroughly in earnest it would be hard to find. Hour after hour they discussed, and the longer they talked the more clear it appeared to them, that China was in a desperately needy condition and that Christianity alone could save the country. Their faith in what a mere change in the form of Government could do had been rudely shaken by the experiences of the past few years. They saw with a clearness impossible a few years earlier, that although the Nation had overthrown the Manchus, it had not yet rid itself of the autocracy, and further, that the adoption of a constitutional form of Government did not of itself do away with some of the worst vices of the old regime.

During the past few years Christians had gained an entirely new standing in the eyes of the people at large. The Revolution in 1911 brought many Christian men into prominence. Their ardent love of country, bold yet restrained leadership, and, above all, the irreproachable integrity of Christians in high positions in both National and provincial Governments had made a profound impression on the Nation. The failure of the Republic to establish a strong Central Government free from the old vices

that flourished under Manchu rule, and the willingness of many officials to sell their souls and their country, if need be, in order to maintain themselves in power, was leading many thoughtful men to consider the claims of Jesus Christ. Moreover, the evangelistic meetings conducted by Sherwood Eddy in 1914 had a very wide influence. Their primary object was to show business men, officials and gentry, that Christianity has a social as well as a personal message, and that in asking a man to break with an evil past and to live a clean, unselfish life, the object is not merely his personal salvation, but that of society as well. The appeal had been throughout: "For *their* sakes I consecrate myself."

They had come to see the unique position of leadership which Christians in China hold today. The work of the China Continuation Committee and of other national, interdenominational bodies in bringing Chinese and foreign Christian workers from all parts of the country to face together for the nation as a whole the tasks before the Christian Church, had given them a new outlook. It had acquainted them with the extent of the Protestant Christian movement. They knew the leavening power in the life of the nation, of the 944 "social settlements" scattered throughout the country in over six hundred cities and towns, in which groups of educated foreigners from every Protestant country of Europe, America and Australasia are demonstrating three

hundred and sixty-five days in every year in home and school, in college and university, in hospital and dispensary, in their work and in their play, what Christian civilization means. They knew that in seven thousand towns and villages, from the northernmost part of Manchuria to Southwestern Yunnan, from Shanghai to the borders of Tibet—yes, and way out in the New Dominions, in a station fifty days' journey west of Lanchowfu, itself six weeks' journey from Shanghai—little groups of Chinese Christians were learning gradually to live "not unto themselves, but unto Him who for their sakes died and rose again."

They knew, moreover, that the 300,000 to 400,000 Chinese Christians connected with the Protestant churches were a united body and that, under the leadership of a few of their own number, they were in a position to act together. God was placing upon them and their friends heavy responsibilities for such leadership.

What could they do? What did God want them to do? How could these three-fourths of a million Christian men, women and children be "mobilized" for the service and the salvation of their people? How could China maintain her independent existence as a nation and prepare herself to take a worthy

place amongst the other nations of the world? She had overthrown the autocratic rule of the Manchu and had repeatedly resisted all efforts to set up again a monarchical form of Government. She wanted a Republic and was prepared to fight on until one had been established, in fact as well as in name, but ninety per cent. of her population are illiterate and must be taught to read and write before a true Republic could be established. The Nation was being swept into the swift current of the world's life and was being forced to face and to adjust herself to new conditions which are bound to change her whole economic structure and are already introducing new customs and social ideals that threaten to undermine the very foundations of society, and will do so unless the Christians supply the only foundation which is adequate to support the superstructure of our modern life.

Is there any wonder that these men were sobered by the task and the tremendous opportunity that lies before the Christian Church in China today? Things some of them had hoped to accomplish proved upon careful study to be impossible. Some things, however, they thought they could do and they determined to begin at once. They would endeavor to enlist every Christian in China in the service of his country. This meant that they would seek to make everyone realize his duty to the community in which he lives—a great program of education in teaching men

to live their daily lives in accordance with Christian principles. They would seek to bring about larger unity in their country, rent by civil strife, by uniting the Christians of China in prayer for the nation. They would grapple also with the great task of teaching the fifty to seventy percent of the illiterate Christians to read, in the hope that once having learned themselves, they would be able to help teach their neighbors.

It seemed as if God had just placed in their hands the means of doing this. They had recently come into possession of a method of writing the spoken language of the Mandarin-speaking portion of the population, which includes all but the three Southeastern provinces. It is a Phonetic Script, consisting of thirty-nine symbols. It was invented several years ago by leading Chinese educators called together in Peking by the Board of Education of the National Government. By means of this system any word in the spoken language can be written by combining two symbols, an "initial" and a "final." Once the thirty-nine symbols are learned and the principle of their combination understood, it is comparatively simple, even for an illiterate adult, to learn to read. Tests made in hundreds of cases with a similar system prove that illiterate adults of average ability can learn the system in three or four weeks. What a great opportunity it offers, not merely to place the Bible in the hands

of the Christians, but to make available for them, and through them for others, a whole range of literature adapted to their needs!

China is indeed fortunate in the growing number of her able, far-sighted and consecrated Christian leaders. Their relations with the missionaries are most intimate and cordial. Close personal friendships between the men of different nationalities and races are increasingly common in China. The opportunity before the students of America to throw themselves into the inspiring task of helping to prepare one-fourth of the people of the world to meet the new conditions and to take a worthy place in the League of Free Nations, is a glorious one indeed. The Christians of China—yes, and very many who are not Christians—earnestly desire our help. They recognize the tremendous significance of these years when Asia, as well as the rest of the world, is undergoing profound changes. They know they are critical years. They want our best and they have a right to it. The problems are too difficult of solution and the tasks too arduous for us to court failure by giving less than this. They need men and women who have a positive contribution to make, who know what Christianity really is and what it is not, and who know how to impart their knowledge to others in a convincing way, both by their teaching and by their lives. They need men and women with big hearts, broad sympathies, thorough preparation, and

the grace of humility. They need generous help also from the financial resources that God has so lavished upon the people of America.

The war has taught us to do big things together. The response to the appeals of our Governments has been magnificent, but the problems faced by the Allies, great as they have been and still are, are small indeed compared with the task given to His followers by Him who seeks our help in setting up on earth a civilization in which God's will is done "as it is done in Heaven." The time has come for the Christians of the world to heed the call of the Captain of our salvation, to place at his service all that we have and are, and by mobilizing all our forces and resources to launch forth afresh upon the greatest and most glorious of all adventures.

"I gave My life for thee;
What has thou given for Me?"